



Mark Roncace, *Raw Revelation: The Bible They Never Tell You About* (CreateSpace: North Charleston) 2012.

Prof. Roncace sent along a copy of his book some weeks back and I'm grateful that he did. It is a rollicking, quick paced, intelligent, observant, and thoughtful look at those bits of the Bible that many seem to cover with fig leaves out of a sense of shame.

Styled on the model of a meal Roncace divides the book into 'Courses' and these include the Bible, God, Jesus, Doctrine, Morality, and 'Other Morsels'. That's six 'courses' plus an introduction, some 'final suggestions', and a recommended bibliography.

There is much to like in this book. It is, if I were to summarize it, a look at the Bible unexpurgated (and indeed, Roncace uses that word on page 78 in connection not with the Bible but with God). Like other volumes of the genre (which seem to be multiplying in recent years), this one too digs behind the pious patina of biblical texts to reveal what are supposed to be the ugly underpinnings.

For example, Roncace insists, God can be a misogynist, genocidal, and cruel. Jesus urged self mutilation. And the morality of our dear Puritan forebears has no relationship to what the Bible actually says.

And, as with other volumes of the genre, we are supposed to believe that all of this will strike the 'person in the pew' (to use one of my own most beloved phrases) as horrifyingly unfamiliar and strikingly appalling.

But is that really the case? Certainly a large percentage of the population is unfamiliar with the Bible, but they aren't just unfamiliar with the dicey bits, they're unfamiliar with all of it. They don't have the slightest notion of how many Gospels there are, what they

are called, what an Epistle is, what the Letter to the Hebrews is about, or even how to find Obadiah without a table of contents. But is that the person who will pick up this book? Perhaps, but I tend to doubt it. Instead, I can see this book attracting the attention of two kinds of people: first, those who are relatively familiar with the Bible; and second, those who are gleeful whenever the Bible 'takes a beating' (i.e., the conspiracy theorists who think Dan Brown writes history and Simcha Jacobovici is an archaeologist).

As to the first group- they probably know that the Levite hacked his servant girl to bits and sent her parts to the tribes of Israel. And they have probably read the Gospels with at least one eye open and noticed that Luke and Matthew have different birth scenarios and Mark and John don't even bother with the tale. They've seen that Job isn't patient and they know well enough the hyperbole of Jesus.

The second group- God bless their hearts- no matter what they read or hear or see they already know the 'truth' and no amount of evidence, explanation, or exposition will convince them of their invincible ignorance.

Hence, this volume, interesting as it is, isn't exactly new nor revolutionary. Further, I'm not at all convinced that it's all that necessary.

I confess, I don't know what goes on in Churches around the country but I know that when, here, in Bible studies, sermons, or Sunday School classes one or other of the 'difficult' texts comes up, they are addressed head on and unflinchingly. Sure, lots of Pastors are too lazy to research the Bible (and it doesn't even occur to them to do so) but their congregants aren't necessarily as lazy and ill suited as readers as they themselves.

In other words, I think that the genre, and the present example of the genre, are unnecessarily pessimistic. People who know the Bible well enough to care about what it says aren't 'shocked' or 'offended' by the odd parts. They've seen them before and they will see them again. People looking simply for conspiracies and secret codes and hidden agendas and all that rotgut nonsense will find them even in the simplest texts and won't be persuaded otherwise.

The only question which remains, then, is 'should I read this book?' To which I answer- 'surely, because you'll enjoy it a lot'. But don't be alarmed by the smitingly charming alarmist tone. The sky isn't falling.

Jim West
Quartz Hill School of Theology